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Spring 3-25-2014

# Information Needs, Utilization and Socio-economic Empowerment of Textile Market Women in Southern Nigeria

Adetoun Elizabeth Adekanye

*University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria, eadekanye@unilag.edu.ng*

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# INFORMATION NEEDS, UTILIZATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF TEXTILE MARKET WOMEN IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

*BY*

ADEKANYE, Elizabeth A. (Ph.D)  
University Library,  
University of Lagos, Nigeria  
e-mail [eadekanye@unilag.edu.ng](mailto:eadekanye@unilag.edu.ng)  
[tounadekanye@gmail.com](mailto:tounadekanye@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

Information is essential and crucial to decision making. Reliable information is necessary for building the awareness resources and practical strategies to improve life time experiences capable of enhancing direct access to knowledge and power. The study therefore investigated the information behaviour and socio-economic empowerment of textile market women in Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design and purposive sampling technique to select two Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria. Findings showed that there was a relative influence of information needs, seeking, sources, and use on the socio-economic empowerment of the textile market women. It was also discovered that information seeking has the highest significant influence on the socio-economic empowerment of the textile market women ( $\beta=0.48$ ;  $t=16.64$ ;  $p=0.000<0.05$ ). Next to this was information sources ( $\beta=0.30$ ;  $t=13.05$ ;  $p=0.000<0.05$ ) and identification of information needs ( $\beta=0.14$ ;  $t=5.05$ ;  $p=0.000<0.05$ ). However information use had no significant influence ( $\beta=0.01$ ;  $t=0.81$ ;  $p=0.859>0.05$ ). The result indicated that the Nigerian textile market women were innovative, dynamic and creative in their entrepreneurial activities when they are empowered with information, which invariably would bring self-sustainability and societal development. The study concluded that the information behaviour of Nigerian textile market women in terms of needs, seeking, and sources have significant influence on their socio-economic empowerment.

**Key Words:** Information needs, Information use, Socio-economic empowerment, Textile market women

**This paper is an extract from a Ph.D thesis titled information behaviour and socio-economic empowerment of textile market women in southern Nigeria**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Information is an essential part of all facets of life. It is such an important raw material, that its acquisition and understanding is germane in decision making, policy formulation, as well as implementation for growth and survival. Reliable information is the cornerstone for building the awareness, expertise and practical strategies necessary to improve the world we live in, in terms of health, physical, technical, mental, social and scientific development of humanity (Adetoro, 2010). Without adequate information, not much can be achieved especially when it concerns decision making or acquisition of knowledge. Information is vital to decision makers at all levels in all circumstances (Ajayi, 2007). However, there is always a need for individuals to obtain relevant information as Meyer (2005), Kamba (2009), Kachharo (2007), submit information helps in reducing the degree of uncertainty in the operating environment of any organization.

The concept of information behaviour begins with an individual's need. Authorities have argued that information need is the lack of appropriate information on which to base choice that could lead to benefits or services that may improve people's well being, (Miranda and Tarapanoff, 2007; Lambert and Loislle, 2007). Kebede (2002), conceptualized information need as the uncertainty that arises in the individual, which they believe can be satisfied through information acquisition. Factors that give rise to information need include seeking answers, reducing uncertainties, bridging gaps, solving problems, understanding (making sense) and coping (Case, 2002). The different characteristics of work environment make one type of information need and seeking different from the other. Therefore, it is beneficial to study each group of information seekers one at a time and use the results to develop user-oriented information systems in order to serve each group better. Beyond this, the assessment of information need and seeking behaviour

of various groups and individuals is essential in assisting them to access and use information resources for optimal performance and productivity.

Kerins, Madden and Fulton (2004) report that the whole essence of information need and seeking behaviour is for information use and the actual process of using information has to do with the way individuals internalize information content. Having access to relevant and timely information has a role to play in the way the information is used. Although, information use is a fundamental concept, there are no definitional or methodological approaches that are broadly accepted or applied. (Kirk, 2002 as cited by Choo, et al 2002).

The term empowerment covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and disciplines. According to Sughosh's India Foundation (2010) and Dasarathi, (2006) empowerment is the process of obtaining basic opportunities for marginalised people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalised others who share their own access to these processes.

In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and the community are fundamentally connected. Women empowerment according to Afolabi (2003) comprises five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic order both nationally and internationally. Some elements as necessary conditions for empowerment include access to skills training, problems solving techniques, best appropriate technologies and information, participation in decision making processes by all people, particularly women and youth, (Singh and Titi, 1995).

In the context of this study, socio-economic empowerment is described from the viewpoint of a woman being financially independent through her engagement in income- generating activities. These include having' access to productive facilities that would enhance her income- generating capacity, having control over the income generated by investing in personal properties, having personal savings either through thrift or bank account(s) and contributing to the financial upkeep of her household, actively participating in household decision-making on issues that affect her livelihood, such as choice of health care facilities, children's school, number of children, child spacing, as well as having improved self-worth gained through awareness and ability to negotiate and voice out concerns on issues that infringe on her rights as a person and as a woman.

In Nigeria, the empowerment' of women has in the recent years come to be recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women. Thus, in 1989 the National Commission for Women, charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the rights and legal entitlements of women, was established. It later metamorphosed into the Ministry of Women Affairs in 1996. Recently, the Ministry evolved a National Gender Policy (2006), which highlights the rights and privileges of women within the Nigerian State.

Nigeria has also ratified various international treaties on women's rights, such as Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) committed to securing equal rights for women. Similarly, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS, 2004) recognizes the need to integrate women into the development process by enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country through measures such as mainstreaming women's concerns and perspectives in all policies and programmes, and promoting women's access to micro-finance and other poverty alleviation strategies.

Textile trading is an area dominated by women all over the world. From the accounts of Colleen (1993), both men and women were noted to be of economic value in the production, distribution and marketing of textile products, He emphasized that "skilled workers at all stages of the manufacturing process, including both men and women, produced the textile for which the Sokoto Caliphate was well known in the 19th century". Colleen mentioned specifically that women received scant attention and contributed directly to the textile industry in a variety of capacities as weavers, marketers, dyers and managers. According to Gereff (2002), textile is known to have contributed globally to the Gross Domestic Product (GNP) of nations and has also offered many ranges of employments to both the skilled and unskilled labour in the developing countries.

It has been established that information is a critical facilitator of socio-economic development of a nation. Therefore, there should be equal access to it regardless of gender. Previous studies confirmed that women, especially in developing countries, lack access to unlimited opportunities that information can offer and this has inadvertently affected their socio-economic status in the society. Also, studies have concentrated on information needs and behaviour of women, but there has been none on information needs and seeking behaviour as related to socio-economic empowerment of women in Nigeria.

It is against this background therefore, that this study seeks to examine the pattern of information behaviour of textile market women in Southern Nigeria and its effects on their socio-economic empowerment.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study is anchored on the following objectives;

1. To find out educational qualification of the respondents.
2. To determine the marital status of the respondents.
3. To find out types of trade textile market in Southern Nigeria mostly engaged in.
4. To determine the correlation coefficients of relationship between information use and socio-economic empowerment of textile market women in Southern Nigeria

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Conceptualising information need is a very difficult task. This is because the needs of individuals usually vary from time to time due to several factors. However, Adereti, et al, (2006) and Aina, (2004) described information need as a piece of information, whether recorded or not, which an individual or a member of a group requires for effective functioning in their daily activities. Information needs can be seen as a set data which enables the user to make appropriate decisions on any related problem facing him or her at a particular time (Solomon, 2002). In other words, information is needed because it enables individuals to make a decision that affects their living, just as Opeke, (2004) suggest that information represents an ordered reality about the nature of the world people live in.

The need for information in any society is individualistic. Individuals need information depending on the motive for such information. Taking the right decisions depends on access to information on all the alternatives and their implications (Ajayi, 2003). Zhang (2001) is of the opinion that a thorough understanding of user information needs and information-seeking behavior is fundamental to the provision of successful information services. Anwar (2007) also reiterates that it is important to understand the information-seeking behaviours of different

groups of people, as it helps in the planning, implementation, operation, designing of new information systems and the development of service programmes in the work environment for optimal performance. For instance women are basically involved in trading, full-time housekeeping, artisanship, as well as other activities in the informal sector of the economy; they need information that will mobilize their status and improve their lot.

Abdulkareem (2010) reiterates that information is even more important to the women group because of the fact that women constitute the larger portion of the adult population in the world and also because of the roles they play in the lives of other categories of people (such as children, men, youths, etc.) in the population. Women are regarded as key to the development of any nation; an adequately-informed woman affects the lives of people around her.

The importance of information to human development and empowerment cannot be over-emphasized, because information has become a supportive input of any development programme. Thus, it can be said that information, if well articulated, could eradicate ignorance and provide enlightenment on how to achieve economic, educational, social, political and cultural objectives. It has been observed that having access to the right kind of information can address the major problems of ignorance and poverty of ideas that hinder the empowerment of individuals. Fox and Fallows (2003) corroborates this assertion by reporting that people who are well informed are able to respond appropriately to the demands of their environment. It also strengthens their social networks.

Women participation in socio-economic activities is not a new phenomenon, the socio-economic activities in which women are involved vary and they are also subsistence in nature; such activities include farming, fishing, hairdressing, black-smiting, bead making and trading, among others. Such activities need to be upgraded to improve women's income-earning base. The



increasing involvement and participation of women in socio-economic activities in Nigeria is borne out of the general concern by women, especially those in the rural area/sector, to alleviate the economic conditions of their households. According to Williams (2006) and Ajadi, et al (2010) affirm that persistent poverty and deteriorating economic conditions have forced many rural women to work outside the normal status quo, compelling them to venture into various economic activities while at the same time continuing to perform their traditional household chores. Women on the one hand actually work for long hours, carrying out household chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning and raising children. On the other hand, they engage in other income-generating or income-substituting activities such as farming, trading, etc. In other words, present-day women are no longer confined to traditional gender roles of wives and mothers but also are involved as wage workers and income earners of their families.

The most popular forms of economic empowerment for women is microfinance which provides credit for women who are usually excluded from formal credit institutions. Microfinance enables poor women to become economic agents of change by increasing their income and productivities, access to markets and information, and decision-making power, (World Bank). Offering women a source of credit has been found to be very successful strategy for alleviation poverty because it enhances the productivity of their own small enterprises and the income-generating activities in which they invest. Results include an increase in women's self-confidence and status within their families as well as income that they can use to improve their families' well-being through improved health and nutrition.

Rogers and Youssef (1988), also recognize the importance of group saving programmes and cooperatives as catalyst for empowering women. These programmes, according to them, will not only allow women to interact with one another, they will also create an exchange of ideas and

information which will increase women's ability to earn a greater income and allow for more flexible work environment where they can rely on other women for support on matters such as childcare.

Ojobo (2008) observed that education is a catalyst for women's empowerment, as such education and training being a major social empowerment for women should be universally made applicable to women in all parts of the world. This will definitely enhance the awareness in women which in turn will increase her confidence; a confident and well aware woman would be able to tackle inequality and discrimination in a far better way than an ill-equipped and ill-trained women.

It is therefore suggested that women should be involved in educational policy formulation, extensive enlightenment campaigns, the discarding of stereotypical division of work into men's and women's job. Also, women should organize themselves to meet the challenges of a positive and meaningful role in the struggle for personal and national emancipation, development and progress (Olawepo and Jekayinfa, 1999).

### **Research Methodology**

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey. The elements studied were the information needs, information utilisations and socio-economic empowerment of textile market women of Southern Nigeria. 1600 textile market women across the zones, states and markets participated in the study; multi-stage sampling technique was employed to sample the participants. Questionnaire as research instrument was used to gather data in which 1566 copies of questionnaire was found useful for the analysis and descriptive method of data analysis of

frequency counts, percentages, correlations and multiple regression analysis were used to present data.

## **DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

The demographic characteristic of the respondents revealed that 1566 textile market women participated in this study, out of which only 2% were less than 20years of age; 22.5% were between 21 to 30 years of age; 26.9% were between 31 to 40 years; 29.4% were between 41 to 50 years and 18.4% were above 50 year while only 0.7% failed to indicate their age cohort. It is obvious that majority of the participants are in their middle age (21-50 years) with response rate of (1235 or 78.8%. The positive picture presented about age distribution of textile market women in Nigeria was an indication that majority of the respondents were in their active years. Implication of this is that the sector is vibrant, with an active population required for the sustenance of the business and also fitted into what obtained in Nigerian work-force as indicated by Owoyemi, et al. (2011).

Analysts from the Human Capital School of thought view age as in large representing one's work experience and a value that is highly rated in the job market (Beck, 1994). In Africa societies, age also symbolizes experience and it conjures meanings of power and prestige.

### **Educational Qualification of the Textile Market Women**

The respondents were asked to reveal their educational qualification and the report shows that 1.7% had no formal education; 5.8% had adult education; 18.5% had primary education, majority of them (48.2%) had secondary education; 23.8% had post-secondary education. Only 2.1% of the participants failed to indicate their educational level. This implies that majority of the textile market women (1128 or 72.0%) had more than basic education (Secondary and post

secondary). This may also mean that the textile market women in the textile industry are educated. Studies based on the human capitalist model suggest that people who have more years in school or had formal education make greater use of available opportunities including decision-making in their homes. For sociologists, education is also a structural indicator of the socioeconomic position of a person, household or group in the social stratification system (Chafetz, 1991).

Overall, analysts see education as a basis for social differentiation among members of society (Robertson, 1995). For instance, in one study in Rwanda, Clay and McAllister (in Fendru 1995) found that education had both direct and indirect effects on income levels. The educated apparently had more efficient control and use of household labour as well as access to higher paying jobs. Thus, it stands to reason that the educated among the textile Market Women in Nigeria will largely have a greater ability to make many and important decisions about their trading activities.

The implication of this is that textile market women in Nigeria were not all illiterate as presumed or perceived; the sector is populated with people with basic and standard education requirement expected for that kind of trading activities. Going by the words of Aristotle, “education is the best provision for all ages, no doubt education makes a man broad minded, enhanced his personality and groomed him”. All over the world, education is regarded as the key factors in overcoming the barriers that women face and basic tool for empowerment and brought women into main path of development.

**Table 1: Educational Qualification of the Textile Market Women**

Educational Qual.	Freq.	%
No formal Educ.	26	1.7
Adult Educ.	91	5.8
Primary Educ.	289	18.5

Secondary Educ.	755	48.2
Post-secondary Educ.	373	23.8
No Indication	32	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>100.0</b>

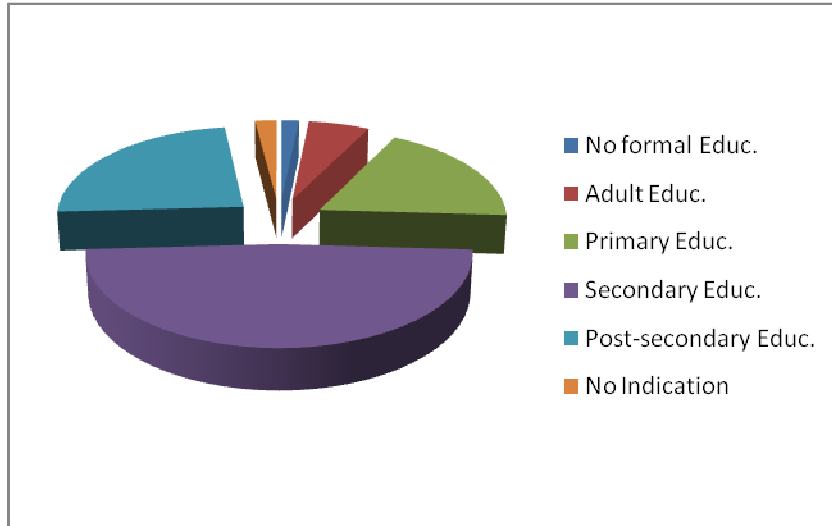


Figure 1: Educational Qualification of the Textile Market Women

### Marital Status of Textile Market Women in Nigeria

The analyses further revealed that majority of the women under study were married. One of the characteristics for distinguishing people in Africa societies is marital status. Traditionally, marriage confers respect, prestige and also it is associated with rights of access to resources. Feminist scholars and sociologists are of the opinions that married women have access to critical resources because of their affiliations to husbands and are likely to make more decisions in their homes than single women. For instance, in Bangladesh, Hossain (2011) found that some married women were able to control savings from money which they generated from selling of daily products poultry, goats and other farm goods. The implication of this is that these women are stable with high possibility of concentrations on their trading activities which in turn give them

the opportunity to build a stable family and also add values to their status and enhance their profitability.

**Table 2: Marital Status of the Textile Market Women in Nigeria**

Status	Freq	%
Single	177	11.3
Married	1138	72.7
Separated	104	6.6
Widow	133	8.5
No Indication	14	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>100.0</b>

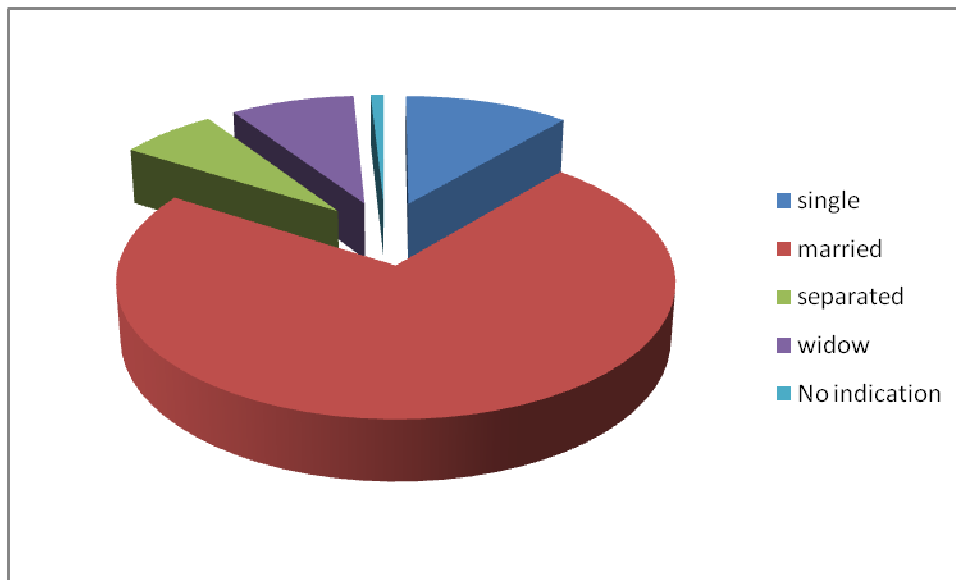


Figure 2: Marital status of Textile Market Women in Nigeria

### **Types of Trade Textile Market Women are involved in Nigeria**

The analysis as shown in Table 4.1.3 above revealed that majority of the textile market women are involved in wholesale business (686 or 43.81%) and retail business (800 or 51.1%) respectively as against only few (80 or 5.1%) that are involved in sub-retail trading. The result from the findings indicated that majority of the market women in textile business are into retail and wholesale trading.

The result from the findings indicated that majority of the market women in textile business are into retail and wholesale trading, meaning that they were not petty traders. Textile trading is a thriving, booming and lucrative economic activity with a long history of empowerments. It is also a major contributor to income and Gross Domestic Products (GDP) of many nations, Nigeria inclusive. According to Gereff (2002), textile industry is one of the oldest, largest and most global industries in the world which has offered chains of opportunities which include entry level jobs for unskilled labour force in developing countries. Breuton, et.al.(2007) corroborate the above statement in that clothing sector has played such an important role in economic development, despite relative low startup investments' costs. Expansion of the sector will provide a base upon which to build capital for more technologically demanding activities.

**Table 3: Types of Trade Textile Market Women are involved in Nigeria**

<b>Types of Trade</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
Wholesale	686	43.81
Retail	800	51.1
Sub-retail	80	5.1

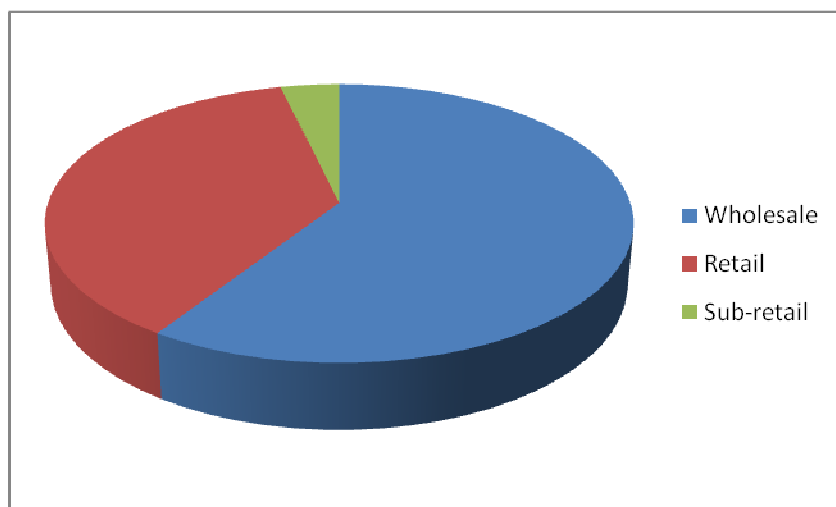


Figure 3: Types of Trade Textile Market Women are involved in Nigeria.

**Table 4: Result of correlation coefficients of relationship between information use and socio-economic empowerment of TMW in Nigeria**

Variables	N	Means	Std. D	R	Sign	Remark
Information use	1487	47.90	15.72			
				.198	.000	Significant
Socio-economic Empowerment	1487	34.86	12.59			

The analysis shown in Table 4 revealed further that there was a significant positive relationship between information use and the socio-economic empowerment of the textile market women ( $r = 0.20$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Therefore, null hypothesis three was rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between information use and socio-economic empowerment of textile market women in Nigeria. The information from the study also revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between information use and the socio-economic empowerment of the textile market women ( $r = 0.20$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) (see table 4.16). Therefore,



null hypothesis three was rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between information use and socio-economic empowerment of textile market women in Nigeria. Information is seen as key resources that can aid development. Mayer, (2003), Gursten (2003) had earlier emphasised that effective use of information can support economic development and social change. Access to basic and additional information will eventually empowered individual, successful universal access to information and the use depends not only on the availability and affordability of infrastructure, but also on the availability and quality of suitable content and application. The implication of this is that, availability and use of information enable the individual or groups of people to make rational decision and reduce their levels of uncertainty.

**Table 5: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Relative Influence on independent variables and depended variable**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	52.780	1.796		29.390	.000
Information needs	.443	.088	.139	5.054	.000
Information seeking	-.581	.035	-.482	-16.638	.000
Information sources	.402	.031	.302	13.052	.000
Information use	3.725E-03	.021	.005	.177	.859

a. Dependent Variable: socio-economic empowerment

Table 5 above presented the contribution of the independent variables (information needs, information seeking, information sources, and information use) to the dependent variable (socio-economic empowerment) and it showed that information seeking made the highest significant influence on socio-economic empowerment of the textile market women ( $\beta = -0.48$ ;  $t = -16.64$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). This was followed by information sources ( $\beta = 0.30$ ;  $t = 13.05$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ )

and identification of information needs ( $\beta = 0.14$ ;  $t = 5.05$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Information use made no significant influence ( $\beta = 0.01$ ;  $t = 0.18$ ;  $P = 0.859 > 0.05$ ). This implies that information seeking, information sources, and information needs do significantly influence the socio-economic empowerment of textile market women while information use had no significant influence on the socio-economic empowerment of the textile market women. According to the analysis, information use has significant relationship with socio-economic empowerment but it is also shown not to be contributing significantly to socio-economic empowerment. This is possible because increase in information use can bring about increase in socio-economic empowerment. In other words those that are of high socio-economic empowerment might be those that use information the more. But the information use according to multiple regressions is not what influences their socio-economic empowerment.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Women can be described as indispensable group in the development of any nation. Apart from their numerical strength as projected by the Nigeria Census Statistics of 1999 and 2006, women in Nigeria, in general have great potentials necessary to evolve a new economic order to accelerate social, economic, and political development and consequently transform the society into a better one. These can happen if women are exposed to adequate and timely information. Also, they should have access to information, as information is the key to global development and it is an integral part of all forms of developmental activities. Worldwide, many women are entrepreneurs, which emerge from an individual's creative spirit into long-term business ownership, job creation and economic security. As such, an adequate understanding of the information behaviour of the market women is crucial in planning and programming that address their socio-economic well being in the areas of commitment, integrity, entrepreneurial development, capacity building and innovation.

Based on the findings, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Relevant information should be prepared in need based comprehensible formats in the local languages to reach the unreached. ICT managers have to utilize audio and video, facilities to reach the illiterate women who are otherwise competent and worthy in their own fields of activities.
2. Library and information professional should endeavour to document vital and relevant information and as well manage it in order to make it available for future use.
3. There should be awareness campaigns and affirmative action by civil society, government, private sector and other relevant organs on rights and policy interventions already in place targeting women in their areas of needs. This would enhance their effective participation in the social, economic, and political systems.
4. Relevant and adequate information through authentic sources be promoted by all stakeholders to enhance peace and tranquility among textile market women.

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